



Tip Sheet - Good meetings

Action Groups are the engines of the campaign, and meetings are where we generate the action. For this reason, good meeting practice are a number 1 priority. Bad meetings repel people; but good meetings retain new members, and help them feel that there's a role for them. The good news is that anyone can learn to run meetings! But first, let's do some diagnosis. Below are sliding scales for group function. Be honest!

Where does your group fit on this sliding scale?



We agree on an agenda and follow it	We tend to wander off-topic
Everyone gets to speak and feels included	A few people do most of the talking
We're focussed on action	We do lots of worry-talk
We finish projects and tasks	We have trouble finishing things
We have a clear ending time	Our meetings can drift on and on
Action notes are emailed within 1 or 2 days	Notes take a week to be emailed
Action notes are clear about who's doing what	Notes are wordy. Actions are not clear
Several people know how to facilitate	Only one person feels confident
Several people can take action notes	Only one person feels confident
We know when to use smaller working groups	Even with 20 people, we don't use working groups
We delegate tasks to working groups for speed	Jobs take a long time in the big group
New people can get involved and do things	New people tend to drift away
We take time to reflect on our meeting process	We never reflect on our process

Action groups are different from community clubs. Clubs committees have formal structures and can move slowly. But we're dealing with an immediate threat - we have to run at *campaign speed*, not *club speed*. Action Groups need to be nimble, inclusive and productive (see the tip sheet on **Effective Action Groups**)

The Facilitator role

The Facilitator makes sure the meeting stays on-topic, and that everyone can participate. One eye is on the agenda, and the other eye is on how the group is functioning. If you're very involved in the discussion, it may be best if someone else takes on this role. It's ideal if several people in your group learn to do it. Tips:

- Have a buddy at your side who prompts you if you get lost
- Schedule time at the end to discuss 'What went well? What could we do differently next time?'
- Give yourself permission to be a Learner, we all have our L-plates on in this campaign.
- If a person is learning to facilitate, they might want to facilitate 3 consecutive meetings, to gain confidence.



Self-facilitation

We all need to self-facilitate - good meetings are everyone's responsibility. We all have to hold ourselves back at times, and keep tabs on the meeting process. If we notice someone trying to speak, we can draw this to the attention of the facilitator. Discuss facilitation in your group, do the diagnosis included earlier in this tip sheet together Don't worry if your group struggles with these things – it's very common! The main thing is to keep learning.

Agree on the agenda and follow it

The person convening the group asks for agenda items. Before the meeting they email the proposed agenda. The group decides who will be Facilitator. If that person is learning how to do it, they might like a buddy. The Facilitator clarifies the agenda order. If the group tends to stray off-topic, write it up on butcher's paper.

Stay on-topic

When people toss in stray topics, your meeting can divert into a 'talk-fest' and cause frustration. Even worse, worry-talk can start to dominate. The Facilitator can say things like:

- *It would be great if we can stay focused on the agenda...shall we get back to Event Planning?*
- *We seem to have strayed off-agenda...Fred, how about working this up with Bob outside the meeting?*

If the group has chronic habits of going off-topic, you could use the 'Parking Lot'. This is a butcher's paper for stray issues that the meeting can't deal with now. Anxiety can drive off-topic interruption...but worry-talk feeds anxiety. The way to stop being anxious is to have effective meetings and action.

- *That's a big question Fred...not one we can deal now. How about we put fracking chemicals in the Parking Lot?*
- *Do we want to change the agenda to include this topic, or shall we keep working through the list?*
- *It sounds like Fred and Bob are keen to get info out about fracking chemicals. Would you two be willing to get letters on this topic in the local papers during next week? Or join Saturday's stall to talk with people about it? Maybe you two could talk about it after this meeting? I'm conscious we need to move on...*

Make sure everyone feels included

By keeping a speaker's list, you'll help participation. Your eye scans the room for people with their hands raised to show they want to speak. Say *OK let's hear from Jo, then Meg, then Bob*. Other useful phrases are:

- *I'm aware Millie has been trying to speak for a while*
- *Is there anyone who has not spoken on this?* (important to encourage the shy ones)
- *OK... (looking round the room)... who haven't we heard from?*

If someone dominates, say *I'm conscious there are people here who've not spoken...* and **shift your eyes** to the rest of the group. This breaks the pattern.

Focus on action, and finish projects and tasks

During the meeting, we pay attention to **what** actions will be done, and **who** is doing them, by **when**. This is the difference between an Action Group, and a discussion group. Action groups win campaigns. If the group can't seem to finish a project, we need to do some problem solving:

- *This project never gets finished. How could we approach it differently?*
- *Instead of working this up here, could we have a small working group finish the leaflet by next week?*
- *OK - How many want to finish the survey so we can use the outcomes in our messaging?*
- *How about we set a survey deadline for Tuesday? Shall we meet here at 2pm next Saturday to finish it?*
- *Mary - you seem to have a lot of things on your plate... how would you feel if Trish took on that job?*
(Sometimes good-hearted individuals become a 'choke-point' by taking on too much).



Keep track of time

The facilitator reminds the group how they're going for time. This invites others to help manage the meeting.

- *We've spend a fair bit of time on this topic, are we ready to move to the next item?*
- *We've only got 15 minutes left. Do you want to keep talking about X or shall we move to Y?*
- *It looks like we can't get through everything today. I propose we hold the road-show idea for the next meeting.*
- *The Minister's visit seems to be the priority. Is everyone happy that we focus on that for the last 10 minutes?*



Make Action Learning your last agenda item

This gets everyone into the habit of thinking about good meeting process. It will enable your group to problem-solve how to improve meetings.

- *Nice work everyone – great to see so many people taking on jobs in this meeting.*
- *Let's reflect on how we went. What are some things that went well? What could we do differently next time?*

Know when to use smaller working groups

It's difficult to participate in groups of more than 12. And unless people participate, they won't find *the thing that they can do*. They may feel that the people doing all the talking are better at doing things. In small groups, people are more likely to discover how they can contribute. Smaller working groups punch out the work faster. Working groups might be permanent, or just for a specific task.

- *Is this something that could be better dealt with in a small working group? Meg, would you be willing to work with Fred and Bob to work out the details and bring the leaflet to the next meeting?*
- *Can we hear from Ted who convenes the Stalls and Letter writing group?*

If a large group has chronic uneven participation, you could use buzz groups **during** the meeting. This will interrupt the pattern, and increase participation.

- *Can I suggest we use the next 10 minutes to brainstorm the Event in 2 groups? Over on this table - Ideas to attract families. And over there - Logistics. Any other groups needed? Here's the butcher's paper. Let's share ideas in 10 mins.*



Keep meeting notes brief. Email them within 1 or 2 days

It's best if several people share note taking. It's not difficult. Simple notes are best: they just need to make it clear **who** is doing **what**, by **when**. By having action note format (see below), you reinforce that meetings are about action. To start the meeting, move swiftly through last meeting's actions. Thank people for their work. Explore ways to streamline – for example, you may want to start the meeting with template prepared on your laptop - and type notes during meeting. Ask for clarification if you have missed an action. After editing, the notes are ready to send that night. Establish a habit whereby meeting notes are disseminated within 2 days. Avoid bureaucracy.

BLUEDELL PROTECTION GROUP NOTES 23/4/15		
Present – Sarah, Tania, Fred, Bob, Hanif, Kim, Millie, Nell (notes)		
ITEM	DECISION	ACTION
1. Notes from last meeting	MP visit	Still waiting on John Smith to reply. Hanif to phone again tomorrow.
2. Treasurer report	\$120 allocated for new signs	Bob to give receipts to Fran for reimbursement
3. Submissions	We encourage everyone to make a submission before 17/10	Tania to email her submission to the entire email group tonight
4. Mining Free Community strategy	Forming a working group to drive this.	Sarah to convene. Meeting Tues 24 th 5.30pm Bluedell Centre Bill, Barb, Kim, Nell and Fred
5. Etc.	Etc.	Etc.

Help new people get involved

Sometimes a lack of confidence gets in the way. If no one volunteers to take notes, say:

- *I wonder what's getting in the way of people taking on the Notes job? Would someone be willing to give it a go if I helped you edit today's notes?*

Finally, it can be good to create a pathway for new people, so they gain confidence to do things. You could invite them to do **Read it - Write it - Talk it** (see the tip sheet). This induction pathway for new members builds their confidence and, at the same time, gets useful campaign work happening.